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ABSTRACT

Analysis of a few short segments of discourse, produced by two Afro-American college students in a freshman composition class, demonstrates one obvious way in which young people in the United States are severely threatened by the educational system. "Darrell" tells the story of how he was suspended from high school by a respected teacher and his subsequent "giving in" and becoming the great student everyone knew he could be. This demonstrates the validity and applicability of Paulo Freire's theory of the violence behind the formation of oppressed consciousness and how what Freire calls "domesticating education" produces the absence of a fighting spirit, the disinclination to criticize, and accommodation. Two short utterances of "Linda" identify and define a more resisting attitude, which, though capable of enacting its critical and fighting spirit, is nevertheless inhibited from producing criticism in other than alienated forms. Even if writing teachers limit their aspirations as teachers to improving students' thinking and writing skills, the best way forward even for those modest goals is through the Freirian project of helping promote and enact in students what he calls a critical sense of their reality--in contrast to what can be defined as the disempowering "Henry Higgins" project. (Sixteen notes are included; 28 references--some with brief annotations--are attached.) (RS)

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Philip Frisk

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

Black English and the Henry Higgens Project: Avoiding Disempowering Interventions into "Black English"

By Philip Frisk
Michigan State University
March 1989

According to ED Hirsh, the key obstacle preventing American youth from developing clear thinking and writing skills is because they don't know enough, and what is it that they don't know enough of? Well, there is his list, a 63 page index of "What every literate American needs to know" at the end of his book Cultural Literacy.

Somehow I don't think Hirsh has got it right. To me, Ira Shor has a better explanation. Ira Shor, whose work in adapting the philosophy of education of Paulo Freire for a Northamerican context I admire and wish to emulate, says that the problems our students have with thinking and writing critically comes from their having been invaded and flooded by the cultural myths and life-styles of mass consumer culture.

I agree with Shor and would add that this invasion by mass consumer culture is not unlike that invasion of the consciousnesses of the oppressed, which Freire describes in Pedagogy of the Oppressed. According to Freire, under the threat of violence the oppressed are forced to introject and internalize the image of their oppressor. To the extent to which they do so, their thinking becomes alienated, informed by superstition and naivete, and they are unable to deliver themselves of clear, rational criticism[1].

Now, it's easy for us to think of young people in the US as alienated and confused, victims of TV, rock videos, and bad movies, resulting in what young person himself has called the Mass Mushing of the Mind, but it's not as clear to us that the causes for this might be traced back to acts of violence or even threats of violence against them.

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The Joe Clark Threat

Young people in the US are not usually the targets of overt state terrorism. Paul Hunter, a Freirian, states the obvious when he says, "No one would argue that political repression, economic alienation and physical suffering are as severe in the U.S. as they are in the Third World" where Freire worked out his psychology of oppressed consciousness [2]. Hunter goes on to assert however that "a culture of silence and a banking concept of education [do] pervade the U.S," producing, notes Hunter, what Bertram Gross has called the "personal pacification in North American schooling."

Hunter and Gross's argument is that it's not necessary to use physical violence or even threats of physical violence in the First World, because, as Gross says, "the entire educational system itself may be seen as a mammoth set of disciplined activities that ... produce docile, accepting personalities" (277).

However, I would argue, that there is at least one obvious way in which young people in the U.S. are very severely threatened. I want to call it the Joe Clark Threat, after the Paterson, New Jersey, high-school principal, known for his bull-horn and baseball bat, lionized by ex-secretary of education William Bennett (and now whose "story" has itself been made into a film for mass consumption).

The threat of course is that of being permanently expelled from high school and the potentially disastrous consequences of this for one's future economic well-being and life-style. This is an especially severe threat for those young people who are already members of the middle class, or who are aspiring members. They are made to understand very well that without a high school diploma, you can't go to college, and, if you don't go to college, you can't get a degree, and, as I once heard Tom Wolfe say, "The B.A. degree is the thin red line separating the middle class from the working class." [3]. One young man put it this way: "I used to be rebellious but then I got put in my place. They made it very clear: It was either change or get kicked out for good." Without a high school diploma, one could easily find oneself excluded from even the working class, and this is especially true if one is black.

For the next several pages, I am going to be analyzing a few short segments of discourse, produced by two Afro-American, college students, whom I will call Darrell and Linda.

First, I will use Darrell's story of what happened to him in high school to demonstrate the validity and applicability of Freire's theory of the violence behind the formation of oppressed consciousness, to demonstrate, in other words, how what Freire calls "domesticating education" produces the absence of a fighting spirit, the disinclination to criticize, produces, in a word, acccommodation.

Next, I will use two short utterances from a second student, Linda, to identify and to define a more resisting attitude, which, I hope to demonstrate, though capable of enacting its critical and fighting spirit, is nevertheless inhibited from producing criticism in other than alienated forms.

Finally, I will argue that, even if we limit our aspirations as teachers to "improving our students' thinking and writing skills," the best way forward even for these modest goals is through the Freirian project of helping to promote and enact in them what Freire calls a critical sense of their reality [4] --this in contrast to what I will define as the disempowering Henry Higgens project.

A word about the context in which these utterances were made and recorded. It was a freshman composition class at a predominately black university in the mid west. The class began with Darrell reading outloud the last paragraph of an essay he had written in response to one of my writing assignments: Describe someone you are reminded of by the title character in "Hardrock Returns to Prison from the Hospital for the Criminal Insane," a 37 line poem by Etheridge Knight, very similar to One Flew Over the Cookoo's Nest. In the poem, Hardrock, a rebellious black inamte, is lobotomized by prison authorities to teach the other convicts a lesson. (For the text of the poem, see [5]).

The gist of what Darrell says is that the person Hardrock reminds him of is himself. He too used to be something of a rebel and troublemaker in high school, but then one day (he tells us in a earlier part of his essay (reprinted in [6]), one of the few teachers for whom he had much respect had Darrell suspended.

This changed him drastically. He gave up and gave in, becoming, as he says, "the great student everyone knew I could be," but at a cost...

"They took away my fighting spirit," he says, so that now, "when teachers did unjust things," he "excepted" [sic] them. "They robbed me of the one thing that made me me." (Incidentally, the fact that he seems more depressed than angry about this is evidence for the truth of what he says about having been deprived of his fighting spirit).

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Needless to say, I was shocked. The suspension changed me drastically. When I went back to school I was the great student that everyone knew I could be. They took away my fighting spirit. When teachers did unjust things I exepted [sic] them. Like Hardrock I was robbed of the one thing that made me, me. I know that my fellow students had to have admired my antics, but my antics were gone, along with my personality. They tamed me, but I learned a valuable lesson.

Darrell says that he learned a valuable lesson. What is the lesson? and what's so valuable about it? Well, the lesson is that he's learned how to renounce what he's called his "fighting spirit." Now, when teachers do unjust things, he writes that he "excepts" them. He's learned I think how to turn his anger against his anger in order to repress his anger, and it's worked! It's no longer available to him, so it feels as if it has been taken away.

But what's so valuable about this? The answer comes I think in the form of a couple of commentaries by Darrell's classmates on what's happened to Darrell. One of them will say and the other agree that it was a good thing that happened to Darrell, because if he had not been straightened up when he was, he might not be here now, which means of course that he wouldn't have had the chance for a middle-class life. The point to make here is that Darrell's accommodation, under the severity of the threat against him, is seen as a rational decision.

Note the language use. Darrell represents him self as the object of the actions of others: they took away my fighting spirit, they robbed me, they tamed me, and his classmates will use language in which Darrell is represented as the object of the action of others. He got straightened up (by others, by the high school authorities).

Mr M:

It was a good thing that happened to D, because had it not happened, maybe it've kept going in the way he was going, and maybe he'd've been kicked off for the whole year, and if he'd been kicked off for the whole year, maybe he wouldn't be here now. So that there might've just straightened him up and had him doing the best thing that was best for him.

Ms G:
I think he (Mr D) got what he deserved. If you act...if you're bad, you're supposed to be punished for it. If you commit a crime, you should go to jail for it, and I think it was also to his best interest that he got straightened up before graduation time, because he might not have graduated, and like M said, he might not have been here now.

Regarding self concept, Darrell seems to think he knows who he is. The image of the great student with which he is now identified is based, I think, on his idea of what his teachers think a great student is. Defending himself from their overwhelming threat, Darrell renounces his former identity and forms a new one around his identification with the image of the great student, as seen in the eyes of his teachers.

If not a great student, Darrell was certainly a good student. I was especially impressed by the fact that he always did his written work completely and on time, and of course he never complained [☺].

Let me turn now to the contrasting attitude, reisistance. In the two following segments, Linda, a sometimes exasperating young women, provides us with a veritable catalog of complaints against teachers: they are not fair, they make up ex post facto laws, they punish too harshly, they accuse you without sufficient evidence, etc. She tells us how she has opposed teacher unfairness with some provocative behaviors of her own. Throwing around legalisms like a Jr Clarence Darrow, smoking marijuana in school, denying hard evidence, disturbing the class by coming in late and saying hi, etc.

LINDA (1): My teacher'd get mad, especially on a day, like if you be...if you come in the room late and if you say "hi," the teacher...okay, if they ain't told you...if they haven't told you you can't say hi, when you come in the room late, then she going to "bus you out"...? not ... "bus you out"...[covering her mouth, gesture of embarrassment]

LINDA (2): At my school one day I was smoking weed and when you smoking weed, it's all over everywhere and they all know who been smokin', [who's been smoking it] 'cause when the teacher come in, they drop it. And they tried to suspend me and say that I was smoking weed. Okay, that was not fair. It was my word against their word, even though I won [was?]... but ... [Hooting laughter from the rest of the class]

The point I wish to make about her criticism however is that it's alienated criticism. For one thing, it's contradictory. Her accusations of unfairness are themselves unfair. More, it's ambiguous. Note again in the above utterance--LINDA(1)--that she retracts her criticism about how teachers will bus you out, apparently for the least little display of adoslescent good humor. But then she says, "No, not bus you out...," and she covers her mouth with the back of her hand, laughs and looks slyly around the room.

In contrast to Darrell, Linda is able to deliver herself of criticism of sorts, but it's alienated and ambiguous. Why does she take it back? We don't know. Does she think she has somehow gone too far, has transgressed her own sense of fairness?

What does she mean by "bus you out"? It's not clear. Is she saying that teachers punish too harshly? or is she making the more serious criticism of racism? We don't know. And then it's retracted under the sign of embarrassment, even before he has been clearly made. Even the embarrassment is (I think) ambivalent, an ambivalent dialectic of genuine and feigned shame and shamlessness.

Thus, while accommodation does not produce criticism, resistance is capable of delivering itself of criticism but it is alienated, ambiguous, ambivalent criticism. The hallmarck of resistance: dividedness, ambiguity and ambivalence. This is no less true regarding one's relationship to language use.

In a final look at this same utterrance of Linda's, I want to call your attention to a feature of Linda's use of language. Notice that she will correct herself twice: once from the black vernacular "if you be coming in the room late" to "if you come in the room late," and once from the slang "if they ain't told you" to the standard "if they haven't told you." I suggest that her relationship to both her own dialect as well as to standard English is ambivalent and reflects the ambivalent concept of self, which I have been saying is the hallmark of resistance.

LINDA (1): My teacher'd get mad, especially on a day, like if you be...if you come in the room late and if you say "hi," the teacher...okay, if they ain't told you...if they haven't told you you can't say hi, when you come in the room late, then she going to "bus you out"...? not ... "bus you out"...

INTERVENTION

Thus far in this paper, I've been mainly concerned with ident-

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ifying and explaining the attitudes of acommodation and resistance from the perspective of Freire's psychology. Thus, Linda's ambivalent relationship to language, which I have inferred from her "correcting" herself in mid-sentnece, reflects, I have been saying, her ambiguous self concept, which I have associated with inhibitions toward her making other than ambiguous criticism. On the other hand, Darrell's accommodation, I have said, means that he has learned to repress his critical impulses (his "fighting spirit") and to think well of himself for having learned to do so: they tamed me, he says, but I became the great student everyone knew I could be.

But now where do we go from here? What do we composition teachers do? How do we work with these attitudes? Where do we begin to intervene and for what purposes?

For the rest of this paper, I want to try to answer these questions by example, first by a negative example, which I call the Henry Higgens project.

Disempowering Intervention: The Henry Higgens Project

How would Henry Higgens intervene with Darrell? Well, he might tell him something like: "Use the active voice, man. Be aware in your sentences of "who is kicking who." Consider that TV judge--not Judge Wampler, the other one--who says in the preamble to his show, 'I chose the law as a way of serving my fellow man.' This is taking responsibility; this is voice; this is writing with power."

Henry Higgens may even do Darrell some good. The fact that Darrell represents himself habitually as the object of the action of others may actually work to habituate him to accept this state of affairs as natural. If self-concept and language use are connected, then a change in one may lead to a change in the other.

The more likely result, however, will be that Henry Higgens succeed too well. Darrell, the great student eveyone knew he could be, will accommodate Henry Higgens and will start, no doubt, pumping out sentence after sentence in the first person singular followed by an action verb: "I chose ... I decided...." All this of course without critical understanding, which Henry Higgens neither asks for nor expects [8].

Ultimatley, however, Henry Higgens fails because he is insufficiently critical, which is to say he is naive. He has got it backwards of course. It's not because Lisa Doolittle speaks like a street person that she is one. It's not how you talk that determines how much money you have; it's how much money you have, to put it crudely, that determines how you talk. Writing with power is most often the result of having power. It's the material realities of power and powerlessness which inform both standard and non-standard dialects. That TV judge talks about choosing

the law against an upper middle class background of luxury home, luxury car, picture on the mantelplace of him as a military officer, etc. It's the rich and powerful who can sing I did it my way [9].

Darrell speaks the way he does--not out of some bad habit, which Henry Higgens can break him of with the proper grammar drills. What Frank Smith calls the "drill and kill" approach. Darrell speaks the way he does--they tamed me, they took away my fighting spirit, they robbed me of the one thing that made me me--out of a profound sense of reality. His representation of self as the victim of school authority --they took away my fighting spirit--realistically reflects his actual social position (as a young black male who is not rich) as the bearer of subordinate social relationships [10].

Empowering Intervention: Problem-Posing Dilogue around Generative Themes

The way to begin with Darrel's language use is not with prescription but dialogue. I recommend that we let ourselves be guided by Freire's formula: "problem-posing dialogue around generative themes." Generative themes are themes elicited from the concerns of the learners themselves. Generative themes are themes which have something to do with domination. Thus we might identify Darrell's theme of teacher injustice and ask him to tell us more about what he means by this. We also might work with him to understand how he would define his response to his teachers' "unjust things" [11].

Another very similar theme is, of course, Linda's concept of teacher unfairness. Basing ourselves on the premise that Linda does indeed have legitimate criticism to make and that it's our task to help her make it, we could begin perhaps by constructing problem-posing dialogue around her phrase "bus you out." What does she mean after all by "bus you out"? Does she means simply that teachers often overreact and punish too harshly? Or does she intend the more serious criticism of racism? Some white teachers use busing as a way to get rid of black students they think of as undesirable.

Standard Vs Non-standard English as Generative Theme

Another of Linda's generative themes is that of the issue of standard versus non-standard dialects of English, which she herself has called our attention to by self-consciously "correcting" her usage twice in mid sentence. We begin by posing a problem for her to solve. Why did you correct yourself? we ask.

To her, it would probably be self-evident. I wanted to speak properly. But it is just this notion of a proper way to speak which we want to problematize by asking, "Where do we get the idea of proper English in the first place?" Our students will usually not know. They think we get it from other English teachers. For them, it's English teachers all the way back. So we have to tell them. Noelle Bisseret is helpful. She reminds us that the idea of a standard dialect came in the with the rise of the bourgeoisie in the 17 and 18th centuries and was used as a class weapon to consolidate their rule. Still today, it's used as a way of sorting out young people on the basis of their membership in social classes [12].

Sometimes they will already know this. One young black woman answered the question of origins by saying, "It comes from those in positions." Exactly, those in dominant positions of power! Nancy Mack last year reminded me of what Freire says of standard English: Why not call it executive, hegemonic, dominating English and be done with it [13]!

Without these insights into the politics of the English language, speakers of non-standard dialects are in a double bind: They may resent being obliged to speak a dialect of English with which they do not feel at home, but they know that they cannot not speak it either, without being stigmatized, even in their own eyes, for using "bad" English with the implication that they themselves are underprepared, disadvantaged, suffering from developmental lag, or whatever the latest euphemism for inherently inferior is these days. Alienated from both their own dialect and that of the middle and upper classes, they are vulnerable to that loss of voice and weakening of personal identity which Ralph Ellison explores in Invisible Man [14].

Conclusion

I define empowerment, then--as in our conference theme --"Empowering Ourselves and Our Students in an Interdependent World" [15] --as the Freirian project of learning (with Darrell) how to find our fighting spirit again and learning (with Linda) to separate its rational kernel from its alienated shell. It is in their refusal to submit, adapt, adjust and to accommodate that we find the kernel of their originality and rational criticism,

which it is our task to nourish into the ability to think, write and act critically upon their reality [16].

Notes

[1] According to my understanding of Paulo's Freire's Psychology of Oppressed Consciousness, oppressed consciousness is formed in violence, real or symbolic, initiated by the oppressor against the oppressed. The oppressed individual may of course either rebel or submit. If she submits, the oppression continues, but if she rebels, the oppression in the form of retaliation may even intensify (especially in the context of the Third World military dictatorships where Freire worked out his theory). Under such stress, the oppressed may do what Freud noted that the ego sometimes does in the face of an overwhelming threat against it, namely, it identifies with the perceived souce of that threat, it identifies with the aggressor, it introjects, in Freire's words, the cultural myths and life-styles of the oppressor (Marx's "ruling ideas"). Often, this identification is so powerful as to be largely without awareness.

The way forward for the oppressed, then, is a kind of political education, in which the critical pedagogue attempts to lead them to a decision to expel, so to speak, their internalized image the oppressor.

[2] Freire worked in literacy projects with Brazilian peasants, until the military coup in 1964 jailed him and then forced him into exile.

[3] I heard Tom Wolfe say this years ago at the University of Arkansas, to which he added (somewhat cynically) that actually what counted even more was if your father had one. A B.S. degree.

[4] To avoid confusion, though, let me be clear that by critical thinking I donot mean the kind of "critical thinking" (currently in vogue) which is little more than training in formal logic and problem solving in order to make the status quo run more smoothly, what Michele Faucualt has called technocratic rationality. No, I have in mind social criticism and social action for social transformation. The point is not to interpret the world but to change it.

[5]

ETHERIDGE KNIGHT

Hard Rock Returns to Prison from the Hospital for the Criminal Insane

Hard Rock was "known not to take no shit
From nobody," and he had the scars to prove it:
Split purple lips, lumped ears, welts above
His yellow eyes, and one long scar that cut
Across his temple and plowed through a thick
Canopy of kinky hair.

The WORD was that Hard Rock wasn't a mean nigger
Anymore, that the doctors had bored a hole in his head,
Cut out part of his brain, and shot electricity
Through the rest. When they brought Hard Rock back,
Handcuffed and chained, he was turned loose,
Like a freshly gelded stallion, to try his new status.
And we all waited and watched, like indians at a corral,
To see if the WORD was true.

As we waited we wrapped ourselves in the cloak
Of his exploits: "Man, the last time, it took eight
Screws[2] to put him in the Hole." "Yeah, remember when he
Smacked the captain with his dinner tray?" "He set
The record for time in the Hole—67 straight days!"
"Ol Hard Rock! man, that's one crazy nigger."
And then the jewel of a myth that Hard Rock had once bit
A screw on the thumb and poisoned him with syphilitic spit.

The testing came, to see if Hard Rock was really tame.
A hillbilly called him a black son of a bitch
And didn't lose his teeth, a screw who knew Hard Rock
From before shook him down and barked in his face.
And Hard Rock did *nothing*. Just grinned and looked silly,
His eyes empty like knot holes in a fence.
And even after we discovered that it took Hard Rock
Exactly 3 minutes to tell you his first name,
We told ourselves that he had just wised up,
Was being cool; but we could not fool ourselves for long,
And we turned away, our eyes on the ground. Crushed.
He had been our Destroyer, the doer of things
We dreamed of doing but could not bring ourselves to do,
The fears of years, like a biting whip,
Had cut grooves too deeply across our backs.

1968

From The Norton Introduction to Literature. Ed. Bain et al. 4th ed. New York, Norton, 1968: 568.

[6] After Darrell had read at my request the last paragraph of his essay, the text of which follows below, he made no further contribution to class discussion, for which, it turned out, he had set the agenda for that day. Linda, on the other hand, spoke often during the class discussion but had written nothing and, generally, did less writing for the course than did Darrell. Darrell's essay:

Hardrock reminds me of myself when I was in high school. When I was in high school I really hated authority in the school, basically the faculty and staff. Many times students take the unjust things that teachers do; however, I didn't! I felt if they could be nasty, I could be worse, and I was. I was a good student and made good grades, but many times in class I would rebel. I would be disrespectful, ungrateful and downright rude. I acted very immature. I was at my best when the rest of the class would laugh. When they did I was relentless. I was sent to the office many times. Teachers knew that I was a good student with potential, but as they put it my behavior was not up to par.

One day I met my match. I came into class late, and class had already begun. I came in and sat down and listened to what was going on. The teacher (who was one of the few I liked) was telling the class of a new grading policy. The class met every other day and on the days between we would go to the library. Well, the new policy said that librarians would determine half of our grade. I couldn't believe that! How could the librarians, who are not teachers, give me half of my grade? This upset me and so I rebelled, or, as I like to say, I went off! I yelled, I was rude, I was sarcastic and I continued until

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the end of class. Then at the end of class I was told to meet the teacher in his office after class. Thinking that I was in no immediate trouble, I didn't go. At the end of the day I was called down to the office of the principal and I was suspended for five days, no questions asked.

Needless to say, I was shocked. The suspension changed me drastically. When I went back to school I was the great student that everyone knew I could be. They took away my fighting spirit. When teachers did unjust things I exepted [sic. Does he somehow intend both "accepted" and "expected"?] them. Like Hardrock I was robbed of the one thing that made me, me. I know that my fellow students had to have admired my antics, but my antics were gone, along with my personality. They tamed me, but I learned a valuable lesson.

[7] My point is of course that what the traditional teacher thinks of as a "good student" is exactly the image which Darrell needs to expel. And he must "expel" it, not just form a new identity around its negation. The latter would be to convert from accommodation to its opposite, opposition, and would be no act of liberation.

[8] This is what makes accommodation so hard to work with: it wants to give teacher what teacher wants but it does it without real understanding or commitment. I personally think that this is why we keep getting flowery, sanitized, vague, and abstract writing. Students, eager to accommodate, think this is what we want. This is why Ken Macrorie always seems to have begun his courses with examples of "Engfish," making it very clear right from the beginning that this is what he didn't want.

[9] For more on the class-based nature of language, see also James and Adrew Sledd, James Zebroski, Lev Vygotsky, Bakhtin (Voloshinov), and Labov, that latter of whom has written: "The major causes of reading failure are political and cultural and dialect differences are important because they are symbols of this conflict" (iv).

[10] I have already made the point that Darrell's absence of feeling tone reinforces (for me) the truth of what he's saying. However, if Henry Higgens probes Darrell too deeply and without understanding of the dynamics of oppressed consciousness, he might just find that lost fighting spirit of Darrell's with unpleasant results for himself.

Accommodation usually presents itself as emotionally depressed, but beneath the surface, there is a lot of anger turned against anger, repressing anger. Because this anger is usually beyond

the control of the ego, the individual experiences it as lost or missing, but, also because it's repressed and therefore beyond control, it's potentially explosive and may erupt in surprising and destructive ways. I am indebted to Finlay and Faith for this and many other insights.

[11] Since we are English and composition teachers, students expect us to intevene at the point of language use, and this is convenient for us because it is, I think, where we ought to intevene. With Darrell therefore, knowing what I think I know now--it has been more than three years since I taught the course whose student utterances I have used for this paper-- I would be very interested in engaging him in dialogue about his single "error"--the word "excepted" from his sentence, "Now when teachers did unjust things I ex¢epted (sic) them." Despite his otherwise apparent mastery of standard English, this "error" suggests (to me) that Darrell is quite alienated from hegemonic language usage, perhaps even more so than Linda.

I say this because this "error" is crucial to our understanding or misunderstanding of the degree of Darrell's accommodation. It thoroughly mystifies and complicates our understanding of what the sentence purports to answer, namely, what exactly is Darrell's post-conversion attitude toward teacher injustice. Because of his "error," we can't know if he "accepts" injustice or "expects" it or perhaps both "expects" and "accepts" it, the latter of which would make for a textbook definition of accommodation. Winston Smith has learned to love Big Brother.

The issue is further complicated, however, by the fact that although he wrote "ex¢epted," which would lead one to think that he meant "accepted," he read the word, that is, he pronounced it, in the audio-video recording, as "expected." Now, there is of course quite a difference between cynically expecting unjust things from one's teachers and actually accepting these unjust things without complaint or resistance. There is yet another possible reading as well, which comes from the fact that Darrell actually wrote "ex¢epted," which means literally "to make an exception of."

Here, the implication is something quite different. He may be saying that he allows teachers a modicum of freedom to do unjust things to him out of his own sense of expediency. In my classrooms, I often encounter this form of "rationalized" accommodation. I consider it to be the most pervasive and frequent student attitude toward abuses of teacher authority, as they see them. As another student in this same class put it: "Why get yourself in trouble? It's best that you follow in order to

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get where you want to be faster." (Incidentally, let me note here the expression of what Noelle Bisseret calls the oppressed's sense of time as "fleeting and parsimonious." It's not only that you might get kicked out of school for good; you might be held back a year or more--which is also a serious threat).

Darrell's "error"--far from being thus the object for prescriptive drill and kill, as Henry Higgens would probably treat it, is, for the critical pedagogue, an instance of an enriching ambiguity (as New Critics used to say), an invitation to dialogue. Thus, I ask Darrell to tell us more: "What are some examples of unfair things that teachers might do, Darrell?" and "How might you react to them?"

[12] The question of origins is important, because, once understood, it works to undo any naive conflation of nature and culture. From this perspective, standard English is seen as not a timeless given like the massive presence of nature but as social construct, something which has had a beginning and, more importantly, will no doubt someday have an end in cultural practice.

[13] Standard English sometimes functions in the same way that Shakespeare in the schools does. See Richard Ohmann's illustration of how this works: The teacher introduces Macbeth, to which the middle-class students will respond in the way she wants; they are her good students and will enjoy success in school. Her working-class students, however, are more suspicious, less inclined to attribute intrinsic value to Shakespeare's words. Quite likely, because of this, the teacher will think of them as bad students. The "bad" students then become progressively more alienated from the goings-on at this site of the class struggle.

[14] These remarks ought not to be taken to mean, however, that I advocate an anything-goes approach to language use or that I think students don't need to bother to learn standard English at all. Far from it, I think they ought to learn it, "master" it, as they say, not however as Lisa Doolittle seeking to "pass" or to "cross-over", but critically! I want them to learn it in the same spirit in which Prometheus is said to have stolen fire from the gods.

While I'm making disclaimers, let me add that I am not advocating a laissez-faire attitude on the part of teachers toward any kind of rebellious, resisting, oppositional, passive aggressive and acting out behaviors in the classroom, as if to say, it's good for them to act like brats. No, again, the object is to hone one's critical skills and to act on them with "civic courage" (Giroux's phrase) for the purpose of ~~and~~ progressive social change.

[15] However, as Nancy Mack has pointed out (1989), the word empowerment has been expropriated by the Bush administration ("with a terribly ironic twist") to name a program which actually withholds money from social programs.

[16] This is also the conclusion reached by Geoffrey Chase, who, drawing on the work of Henry Giroux, uses Giroux's definitions of accommodation, oppositon and resistance to identify the attitudes of three students he worked with closely during their year-long, senior thesis writing project. He found the resistant attitude in the student who wrote her thesis on Meridel LeSueur to be the one which provided the best way forward for personal and academic development.

Last year (1988) at 4C's Bruce Herzberg on a panel with Patricia Bizzell and C.H. Knoblauch called "Writing Against the Curriculum" argued that, despite impressions to the contrary, even our so-called middle and upper middle-class students, our mainstream students, feel themselves, for good reasons, burdened down, oppressed even. (The etymology of oppressed is "burdened."). Herzberg gave a number of reasons why this was so, which I don't have the space to go into here, except to say that that the size of the middle-class has been shrinking in recent years and that therefore many young people are feeling more and more insecure about their economic future.

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